

DANGEROUS LINGERING**NO. 3450****A SERMON****PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, MARCH 18, 1915****DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON****AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON***“He lingered.”**Genesis 19:16*

LOT was highly favored. In the midst of a general destruction, angels were sent to take care of him. He had received a warning which many had not heard—and he had felt the terror that warning should excite—while some who had heard the tidings little heeded their imminent moment. Lot stood in the condition of one who knew that he must leave the city, for it was about to be destroyed, who intended to leave it, who was just about to take his departure, but who, nevertheless, hesitated a little, halted a while, avoided hurry, protracted his stay with some attachment to the place where he had dwelt, and so, in the face of danger, he delayed—being slow to move when fully aware that judgment was swift to overtake, “He lingered.”

I believe Lot to be in this respect the exact counterpart of a great many hearers of the Gospel. They understand at least its threatenings. They know something about the way of escape. They have resolved to follow that way and they intend to do so very soon. Yet for a long time they have halted on the verge of decision, almost persuaded to be Christians. Strong as their resolution to become followers of the Savior seems to be, unhappily they stop short, they linger in their old condition—halting between two opinions.

To such persons I propose to address a few words of exhortation this evening. First of all, *to expostulate with you personally upon personal matters. Then to speak to you about others*, for I have the full conviction that the man who lingers puts others in danger as well as himself, just as Lot’s lingering was hazardous to his daughters and to his wife. And lastly, *to commend the means which I trust God will use tonight*, similar to those which He used with Lot, that some angelic hand or some providential force may lay hold upon the lingerer, that he may be brought out from the City of Destruction and made to flee for help to Christ the Lord.

I must begin by speaking to—

I. THE PERSON WHO IS LINGERING.

I should like to be looked upon, just now, less as a preacher than as a friend who is talking to the lingering one, the one almost decided—talking to him in the most familiar tones, but at the same time with the most earnest purpose. There are certain thoughts which have been, and are still, fermenting in my soul.

I have heard that a conclave was held in pandemonium. In the lower regions Satan had called together all the devils who showed him allegiance and he said to them, “I want one of you to go forth as a lying spirit from this place to deceive many. The Gospel is being faithfully preached and men are being won to Christ, my rival. Spirits of the infernal pit, I desire your help that this Gospel may not spread further. I pause while each one of you, my liege servants, shall tell me of the devices you will use to prevent men from fleeing to Christ. His device that shall seem wisest to my subtlety shall be most fully employed among the sons of men.”

Then one spoke and said, “O prince of the infernal pit, I will go forth and tell men that there is no God, no heaven, no hell, no hereafter.” But the arch-fiend said, “It is in vain. The Gospel has already gone so far with the men of whom I am thinking now, that this would not avail. They know there is a God—they are sure of it. The testimony which has been borne in the world has brought so much light

into it, that they cannot close their eyes to the fact, and your device, though admirable, will not succeed.”

Then up rose another, and he said, “I shall insinuate doubts as to the authenticity of Scripture. I shall belie the teachings of the doctrines of the Word of God, and so shall I keep them from Christ.” But again the leader of that conclave objected that this would scarcely suffice, for the multitude had so heard the Gospel, and those whose conversion he was most anxious to prevent were so conversant with its historical facts, that they could not seriously question them. Neither could they live in systematic doubt who had been schooled in positive belief.

There were many devices, but I will tell you which most of all struck Satan, which he determined to use most among the sons of men. It was this—one foul spirit said, “I will not insinuate doubts about the existence of God or the truth of Scripture. I know it would not avail. But this thing I will do—I will tell men that, though these things *are* true and important, there is no hurry about them, there is time enough and to spare—that they may wait a little, till there is a more convenient season, and then shall they attend to them.”

Now the subtlety of Satan was pleased with this, and he said, “Servant, go your way. You have invented the net in which the fowler shall take more birds than in any other. Good speed to your enterprise. This deadly poison will destroy innumerable souls.”

Feeling this to be the case, it shall be my earnest endeavor to tear that net to pieces and to expose this poison, that none may be entangled unawares and perish unwarned.

Coming back, then, to the purpose with which I started, earnestly and personally to speak to the lingerer, I should like to ask you, my beloved friend, if this matter about which you are still hesitating is not of *vital importance to you*? It concerns your soul, yourself, your true self. It deals with your destiny, your impending, your eternal destiny. You are immortal—you acknowledge a deathless principle within you—and you are conscious that you shall live forever in happiness or woe.

Do you think you ought to put off all preparation for the future that awaits you? If I knew that someone was about to defraud you of your estate, and that unless you were diligent about it you would lose all your property, I think I should say to you, “Bestir yourself.” If I knew that some deadly disease had begun to prey on your constitution, and that, if neglected, it would soon gain an ascendancy with which ’twere hard to grapple, I think I should say, “Go to the physician. Do not delay, for bodily health is very precious.”

But dear friend, if your estate is precious, much more your soul. And if the health of this poor clay ought to be looked to, much more the welfare of your soul—the welfare of your soul forever. Do you not think, if anything should be postponed, it should be something of less importance? Was not Christ right when He said, “Seek, *first*, the kingdom of God and his righteousness”? Does not your reason agree that He was right in putting that first? I shall not need to argue with you.

I speak as to a man who has his wits about him. Is it not so? Suppose you look to getting on in the world, first—you may die and be lost before you have got on! Suppose the taking of a degree at the university should be your first concern—that would be a poor recompense. The honors of learning could not mitigate the terrors of judgment. Do you not feel now (if you will let your better nature speak) that the very first thing a man should see to should be this—to be reconciled to God and have all right with Him for eternity?

I will then ask you another question—is there anything so very pleasant in a state of enmity to God, that you should wish to remain in it? Why should Lot want to linger in Sodom? He had often been vexed there. The very night before he had his house beset with rioters. Why should he want to linger? Have you found any great comfort in being undecided? Is there anything very fascinating in remaining hesitant and halting between two opinions?

Dear friend, if your condition is at all like what mine was before I believed in Jesus, I know you would be glad enough to get out of it. Oh! how earnest I was sometimes in seeking Christ. Oh! how wretched I was at other times that I could not find Him! Then, again, I was stupidly senseless about

divine things, and my self-upbraidings would not let me be at peace. It is a most unhappy condition to be in—to have light enough to know that you are in the dark and no more—to have just enough grace to feel that you have not the grace that can save you—to be enough awakened to feel that if you remain as you are, you must perish forever.

I do not see anything in this hesitating condition that should allure you to keep in it any longer than you can help. Beloved friends, have you ever seriously weighed—if not I will ask you to do so—the solemnity of the destruction which must come upon you if you are not decidedly a believer in Christ, and on the other hand, the unspeakable glory and bliss which will belong to you if you are led to trust in Jesus and are saved?

I can scarcely give you the details of a little incident in Russian history which might illustrate the emergency. The Czar had died suddenly and in the dead of night one of the counselors of the empire came to the Princess Elizabeth and said to her, ‘You must come at once and take possession of the crown.’ She hesitated, for there were difficulties in the way, and she did not desire the position. But he said, ‘Now sit down, Princess, for a minute.’

Then he drew her two pictures. One was the picture of herself and the Count thrown into prison, racked with tortures, and presently both brought out to die beneath the axe. ‘That,’ he said, ‘you can have if you like.’ The other picture was of herself with the imperial crown of all the Russias on her brow, and all the princes bowing before her, and all the nation doing her homage. ‘That,’ said he, ‘is the other side of the question. But tonight, your Majesty must choose which it shall be.’

With the two pictures vividly depicted before her mind’s eye, she did not hesitate long, but cast in her choice for the crown. Now I would fain paint for you two such pictures, only I lack the skill. You will either sink forever down in deeper and yet deeper woe, filled with remorse because you brought it all upon yourself, or else, if you decide for Christ and rest in Him, you shall enter the bliss of those who forever and forever without admixture of grief enjoy felicity before the throne of God.

To my mind there ought to be no halting as to the choice. It should be made. I pray God’s Holy Spirit to help you to make it tonight. On this winged hour eternity is hung. The choice of this night may be the cooling of the wax which now is soft. Once cooled, it will bear the impress throughout eternity. God grant it may be a resolve for Christ, for His cause, for His cross, for His crown.

I would like still, dear friend, to hold you by the button which I laid hold of just now, and to say to you, *What is it that has kept you waiting so long?* Did I not meet you some years ago in the street, and you said to me, ‘Sir, I have been a hearer of yours for many years.’ And I said, ‘Oh! yes, and when did you join the church?’ And you said, ‘Ah! I have never done that.’ And I asked, ‘Why not?’ And you were honest enough to say, ‘Because I am afraid I should be very much out of place there, for I am not a believer in Christ.’

Do you recollect how I squeezed your hand and said, ‘Ah! I hope it will not be long before you give your heart to the Lord,’ and you said, ‘Well, I hope not too’? It is a good long while now—and you have been getting grey since then. I dare say, if I saw you tonight and put the same question to you, you would make the same reply. And in ten years, time, if you and I live, we shall be still relatively in the same position—I still pleading, and you still saying—‘Yes, yes, yes, it is very right.’

Nay, nay, I answer, it is very wrong, that consenting without complying, not doing what the Gospel bids you do, yielding and resisting, as it were, by turns. Repenting and then forgetting. ‘Forgetting!’ Ay, forgetting, and forgetting, till these delays will cast you into irrevocable ruin. What is it you are waiting for, my friend?

Is there some sin you cannot give up? What sin is worth being damned for? If there be one, keep on with it. I defy you to defend your negligence. Put it to this test—if there be any supposable delight that is worth the endurance of eternal wrath, pursue that delight, however sensual it may be, with avidity. But if there be not, do not play the fool or act the madman.

Do I hear you plead ignorance? I would make some excuse for you, if I thought the plea was just and true, but suppose for a minute that it is so? Then, dear friend, ought not you to begin to search the

Scriptures now? Should not you be making intensely earnest inquiries that you might know the certainty of these things? For the soul to be without knowledge is not good. But if you are perishing for lack of knowledge, there certainly is no reason why you should. Many of us would only be too delighted if we might tell you still more fully what is the way of salvation.

“Well, but it is inconvenient just now.” Are you promising yourself a more favorable opportunity? Let me ask you, Do you imagine you will be any better off tomorrow than you are today? Do you think in ten years’ time you will be more likely to lay hold on Christ than you are now? I do not think you will. Have you ever seen sponges that have been turned into flints? Well, that is a slow process—it takes a long time.

The like process, however, is gradually happening to you. Every year you are getting more flinty. The drip, drip, drip of this world’s care and sin is petrifying you. You are getting stony. It strikes me the best time to repent in is this moment—and the very best season in which to fly to Jesus is now. Ere yet the clock has ticked again, your heart will have grown more callous. It certainly does not soften.

When will there be any influence more potent than there is now to help you? The Spirit of God is ready now. Do you want more than His power? The blood of Christ is a full atonement for sin. Do you want anything more than that for your salvation? Do you expect Christ to come down again on earth to save you? Do you want any promise fuller than that which the Bible has in it now, or any invitation more gracious than that which the Gospel gives to you now—“Today is the accepted time: today is the day of salvation.”

I pray you, my lingering friend, linger no longer. Oh! how I wish I could put my hands in yours and lead you to the Savior. But I cannot. I will, however, pray Him to lead you this very night.

“I will think of it,” say you. No, that is the very thing I do not want you to do. I want you to believe in Jesus now and not talk about thinking of it tomorrow. In your seat, if you will rest in Jesus, and trust your soul in His hands, you are saved this very moment. It is an instantaneous work.

*“The moment a sinner believes,
And trusts in his crucified God,
His pardon at once he receives,
Salvation in full through His blood.”*

Oh! that you would’st exercise that simple faith now and not talk about thinking of it tomorrow, for tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow, alas! tomorrow never comes! It is in no calendar, except the almanac of fools. Each day to the wise man is today as it comes. The fool waste today and so wastes all his life. O lingerer, I beseech you, think now of the long time you have lingered. It may well suffice you—it has surely been long enough, and I would say to you, in the words of one of old, “How long halt ye between two opinions?” And quote the saying of yet another, “Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.” And may God the Holy Spirit guide the choice and He shall have the praise.

Now I want to speak a little upon another topic.

II. I REMIND THE LINGERER THAT WHILE HE LINGERS HE ENDANGERS THE SOULS OF OTHER PEOPLE.

When Lot went to his sons-in-law and told them that the city was to be destroyed, “he was to them as one that mocked.” How would they say to him, “Go to, old dotard! Do you think we believe you? The sky is clear and blue, and the sun has risen—dot you think we believe your nonsense about fire and brimstone coming out of heaven? We don’t believe you.”

When Lot lingered, he was defeating his own purpose and doing the worst imaginable thing, if he wanted to convince his sons-in-law that he spoke the truth—for while he lingered, they would say, “The old fool does not believe it himself, for if he did believe it he would pack up and haste away. Nay, he would take his daughters by the hand and lead them out of the city at once.”

A little hesitancy in the conduct of a man who said that he believed a dreadful judgment was imminent would be sufficient to give them umbrage—quite reason enough to make them say, “He does not believe himself what he tells us.”

Have not some of you spoken seriously to others about the value of their souls, though you are not saved yourselves? Did you try the other day to rebuke a swearer? I am glad you did. You are a member of a Temperance Association and you do what you can to stay drunkenness. I am glad you do. You will not allow sin to pass unrebuked in your presence.

But hark you, man, with what face do you reprove others whilst you are not decided yourself? Where is your consistency? Should they turn round on you and say, “If there is anything reliable in the grace of God, why are you not reconciled to Him? If there is anything desirable in religion, why do you not walk according to its precepts? If Christ be a Savior, why do you not yield to Him and obey His ordinances?” I know not what answer you could give. I cannot imagine any response but a blush that should betoken your shame and confusion of face.

The mischief that Lot did to his daughters was yet more aggravated, for all the while *he was hesitating, they were sure to hesitate too*. He was keeping them waiting. They were in jeopardy as well as himself. How many comrades, young man, you might have instructed in the faith before now had you been yourself decided!

It is a happy circumstance when a young married couple become converted to God before their little ones are able to imitate a bad example. I thank God for a father whom I know and honor—that of his children there is only one that can recollect the time when the evening was spent in playing cards—and that one recollects the night when the cards were all thrown into the fire and burnt.

Only one of his children recollects when the Sabbath day was wont to be spent in quiet walks and pleasant recreations, but not in public worship or private devotion. He recollects the rearing of the family altar, when prayer was made a household institution. He can well remember the earnest entreaties made that the father’s sin might not be visited upon the children. Oh! happy circumstance!

Had the parents been converted later in life, the ill example might never have been wiped out. The converted father might have found that the children did not emulate the good example of his regenerate state, but did rather imitate him in the negligence and sinfulness of his natural unrenewed life. When you, who are parents, habitually demur and hesitate, do you not think that other members of your family will hesitate, too?

I have noticed it frequently, where there is a man or a woman knowing the truth in a measure, but not decided. It almost always happens that when the husband or the wife is in the same condition, the moment the father gets savingly converted, the wife comes and avows her faith. Not infrequently the children follow suit. It only needed somehow, in God’s providence, the decision of the head of the household. This has led the others to decision.

It becomes, therefore, a very mournful reflection that there should be men and women lingering upon the brink of the grave who are helping others to halt—their example being the means of keeping others in a state of perilous hazard. You must know, many of you, that it is so with you. Therefore, I shall leave the truth to weigh upon your conscience, hoping it will stir you up to decision.

Let me venture to make one other observation here. I should not wonder if, perhaps, *the death of Lot’s wife might partly be attributed to Lot himself*. If you think that this is a severe reflection, I would remind you that she must have seen her husband hesitate. She was a woman far lower down in the scale than he was—when, therefore, she saw him lingering, it was no wonder if that contagious example led her to look back. Perhaps among the regrets of Lot throughout the rest of his life, there would be this one, “I did not hurry myself out of that city as I should. I was in no hurry. I tarried, and lingered, and paused. I had almost to be dragged out by the angels’ hands myself.” And this, it may be, led her to look back with lingering—and then to be turned into a pillar of salt.

O undecided man! I would not like you to feel that the blood of your wife was on your skirts. O undecided Father! I should dread to have you think, in years to come, “The loss of my children’s souls was due to my procrastination.” Alas! it may be so—it may be so!

Therefore now, with a brother’s earnest affection, let me come to you and say, “You do intend to believe. You have resolved to be a Christian. You are no atheist, and no scoffer. You are not hardened and rebellious—your heart is soft and tender, and ready for these things—then yield it now, yield it up completely this night, to that dear hand that once was crucified. That hand shall mold you according to its own will. Thus says the Spirit of God to you tonight. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, for, “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” He that believes not—though he may have resolved to believe, if he dies believing not—must be damned!

Our last word was to be this—

III. LET US PRAY FOR THE LINGERERS, that they may by some means be hastened.

I do not expect to see angels come walking down these aisles, or threading their way through these pews tonight. But I do trust that a messenger from God will come, notwithstanding that. Sometimes lingerers have been quickened and decided by their own reflections being blessed to them by the Holy Spirit. A very simple observation was once the means of deciding a man.

He was a mechanic and a man of a mathematical turn of mind. He had attended a meeting. The meeting was held in an upper room, and going below the stairs, his attention was attracted by the beam that had supported the people, and he said to himself, “What a weight there must have been upon that!” Just at that very minute, into his mind there flashed, “And what a weight there is resting upon you!”

How that thought should have followed the other, I cannot tell, but as he turned it over, it did seem to him that he had a weight of sin enough to crush him—that he could not bear up under such a weight as that—and that his soul would come down in ruin like many a building whose beams have not been strong enough, that has given way at last. I mind not what form the thought may take—I only pray that some such thought may come home and decide you.

Occasionally, a good man has been the means of suggesting the deciding thought. A smith was blowing his bellows in a smithy one day, when the saintly McCheyne stepped into the smithy for a shelter from a shower of rain. As the smith was blowing the coals and they were at a great heat, he simply said to him, “What does that fire make you think of?” He never gave an answer, but he went his way. It made the smith think of the wrath to come and it made him flee from it too.

We cannot tell what may be, in the gracious providence of God, the means of bringing you to decision. He that used an angel’s hand with Lot, can use a well-timed observation with you. Therefore, I urge all Christian people to use every opportunity and study to season their conversation with grace. Sow beside all waters, for you know not which may prosper—this or that.

Sometimes men have been decided by the deaths of their relatives or their friends. “I may be the next,” has been suggested to them. When the dear child has been buried, it has made the afflicted father reflect that he shall never meet it in heaven unless he mends his ways. So, too, the bereaved mother, in the bitterness of her heart, has sought a Savior in the hope that she might meet her babe again in the better land.

Such things are good. They are blessed deaths that bring eternal life to the survivors! These little ones well spend their lives in winging their flight to Paradise and showing us the way. But surely, dear friend, you don’t require a distressing visitation to decide you. I trust your heart will be given to Christ without the dire necessity that you should lose those you love on earth.

Occasionally, and very occasionally, persons have been decided by personal sickness. Some, but oh! how few, have witnessed the good confession in the hour of death. A soldier in the army of the Potomac, of whom I somewhere read, was taken to the rear to die. He was badly wounded. He was also suffering from fever.

Someone had told him, just before the fever came on, of a soldier found asleep at his post who was condemned to die. The poor fellow, in his delirium, imagining that he was that soldier, cried out to the

doctor who was attending him, "Sir, I am to be shot tomorrow morning, and as I wish to have all right, I want you to send for the chaplain at once. I want to see him." The doctor, to calm his fears, said, "No, no, you are not to be shot tomorrow morning. It's a mistake." "Oh! but I am," he said, "I know I shall." "But I will be here," said the doctor, "and if anyone comes to touch you, I will have him arrested. I will take care you shall not die." "Is it so, doctor?" he said, in calmer accents, "then you need not send for the chaplain. I shall not need him just yet." So the truth came out that fear, not faith, animated him, though it was but spoken in a feverish dream.

How many men, if they thought they were going to die, would say, "Oh! yes, let all be said and done that it is right to say and do." But persuade them that they are likely to live a little longer, they will wait and adjourn their faith while they can allay their fear. Not very often is the decision genuine which men arrive at under the stress of that fear which comes of impending dissolution.

May God's spirit deepen in some here present their sense of sin. May your crimes sting you. May you feel your guilt. May you hate yourselves because of your transgressions. May you be distressed because of your ingratitude, your disobedience, your unbelief. Then you will long to get rid of this horrible evil, this enmity against God. May you feel tonight what a mischievous thing it is for the creature to be at variance with his Creator, for man to be out of order with his God. What a shameful thing it is for the most favored of creatures to be inimical to the Sovereign that favors him. What an incredible thing it is, that while the ox knows its owner and the ass its master's crib, man, the object of love divine, should not know his Lord, his Friend, his Benefactor.

Oh! may you give no rest to your eyes or slumber to your eyelids till you have opened your mouth to profess the name of the Lord and fled for refuge to take hold of His righteousness and strength. Oh! that you might be too agitated to sleep till you have confessed your sin into the ear of the Great Elder Brother, and sought pardon from your God through Christ your Savior.

There is forgiveness, there is mercy to be had—to be had *now*. Whosoever believes in Christ Jesus shall be saved. Believing is trusting, relying in simple but sincere dependence. May His grace enable you to cast yourselves upon His mercy and credit His promise in this good hour, so you shall be this night enrolled among the saved, and He shall have all the praise.

The Lord grant it, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

LUKE 15:1-24

Verse 1. *Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.*

The attraction of His love brought them into the inner circle. Had He been a self-exalting Pharisee, they would have stood as far off as they could if they listened to Him at all. But the Savior spoke so gently, so earnestly, with such evident love in His heart, that "then drew near unto him the publicans and sinners for to hear him."

2. *And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.*

The thunder and lightning of their anger could not turn the milk of His human kindness, but rather did it take an opportunity from their bitter speech to speak all the more sweetly to those who gathered near to Him.

3. *And he spake this parable unto them, saying,*

And then we read three parables—yet are they one. As you have sometimes seen a picture in three panels, so this is one picture in three panels, in which we see three views of lost sinners, and the three divine Persons of the ever blessed Trinity in unity seeking men—saving men.

4-7. *What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he*

layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

A very complete answer to the murmuring Pharisees. Where should the shepherd be but looking after the lost sheep? Is not that one of his first businesses—to seek after that which is gone astray? Does he not derive from it his highest joy? All the sheep that remain at home do not afford him so intense a delight as that one wanderer that his love has sought, and that his power has rescued.

So Jesus Christ seems to say, taking them on their own ground, “You Pharisees are like sheep that never went astray. That is your own view of yourselves. You can never afford Me so much pleasure as these poor publicans and sinners that have wandered. When I shall find them, I shall have special joy over them. Why should I look after you? Am I not, first of all, called to look after the lost sheep of the house of Israel?” And thus He answered their complainings.

8-10. *Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

A second blow for them. “These souls of publicans and sinners are as precious as yours. If you are like pieces of money, so are they. I need not sit and look at you,” says Christ, “like the miser, who counts his hoard which he has in the box, but I do what the woman did who had lost the piece. She could afford to leave the rest laid by in her purse, but she spent all her strength, her eyesight—all her diligent labor upon that one piece.”

Here we have the work of the Holy Spirit, only the Holy Spirit works through the church, who is the woman. It is her business to light a candle—to carry the light of the Gospel. It is her business to sweep the house—often to stir up the dust by the besom of the law. It is hers to seek diligently in every corner and cranny in the deserted and filthy places after that precious piece of money, which has not lost a pennyworth of its value through having rolled away into the mouse hole or lost itself among the cobwebs. She has to seek until she finds it.

Christian diligence is not to stop short of conversion. We are not to *try* to bring men to Christ, but literally to bring them by the power of His eternal Spirit. And when the church finds her piece of money, she, too, has her merry-making. She calls together her friends and rejoices, and the Holy Spirit delights to view His own work in and through His church.

11. *And he said.*

And here comes the grandest of the three parables—that which sets forth the eternal Father’s love.

11-12. *A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.*

He was not content to remain and share everything with his father. The other one would have wished his father to keep all that he had, only too delighted to be a guest in his father’s house, but no, “Give me—let me have it myself—let me be independent—let me have something to call my own.” Human nature—poor human nature! It is not the true spirit of a child. Very ungenerous, unfilial, ungrateful. Why did the father divide the living between them, but that it is God’s will to allow men to go as they will?

13. *And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.*

He could not have done that at home. His father’s eyes would have been a check upon him. Man wants to get away from God because he wants to do wrong. At the bottom of all infidelity there lies a love of sin. Men quarrel with divine truth because that truth quarrels with them.

14. *And when he had spent all,*

For there is an end to all carnal joy. Man can only go a certain length. When he has got to the bottom of the cup, it will not spring up like a fountain and fill itself again. “When he had spent all.”

14. *There arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.*

Just when he wanted all his money, then provisions were dearer than ever. When he had nothing to buy with, everything grew dear. He never had been, while he lived with his father, and never would have been, if he had stayed there. “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.” “He began to be in want.”

15. *And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; And he sent him into his fields to feed swine.*

There was a kindness in that, but it was a degrading kindness. “The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.” He sent him into his fields to feed swine. A Jew, who could not bear the unclean animals—and he must feed swine. When a man gets discontented with the world, the devil and his friends generally suggest that he should do something worse than he has ever done before. They give him some gay amusement—some fouler sin than he has ever plunged into. They tell him that there is no hope, and therefore, he may have all his fling and go the whole length of his tether. “He sent him into his field to feed swine.”

16. *And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat:*

So he could not earn his bread, and he could not get it by charity. To what a state of destitution was he brought. But of all destitution in the world, the destitution of a sinner who has at last grown sick of his sin, but cannot find comfort anywhere else, is about the worst. The old nest is pulled down and you have not got another. The pleasures of the world have fooled you. The joys and delights of ungodly society pall upon your taste and you want no more of them, but yet you do not know of any other delight or any other joy—and dare not hope that there can be another joy to you.

16-17. *And no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself,*

He had been out of his mind all the while. He had been beside himself with sin. “When he came to himself.”

17. *He said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!*

“Still his child, though. Still he is my father, and I know that there is bread enough for me. Why do I not get it? How sad that I should starve, when in my father’s house there is so much.” What a motive that is to a poor hungry soul to go to God, namely, that God has so much—so much that He feeds His servants till they cannot eat it all. They have bread enough and to spare. Why should His child, then, though a wanderer, die of hunger in a foreign land?

18-20. *I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father.*

It was a mercy for him it did not end in resolution. He came to matter of fact.

20. *But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*

Then did he come to his father, or did his father come to him? Well, I think it was both, but still, chiefly that the father came to him. “When he was yet a great way off”—he had not gone half the distance—his father ran the bigger half of the way. He saw him. He had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

21. *And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*

He was going on to say, I dare say, “Make me one of your hired servants,” but his father kissed him on the mouth, and he never prayed that prayer. It was not a Gospel prayer, and would not do, and so he stifled it with love. It was good as far as he did go.

22-24. *But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be*

merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.

Full of joy, intense joy, overflowing joy, sparkling joy. I love that old Saxon word, “merry.” Some are frightened at it. I heard somebody the other day account it quite wicked to say, “A merry Christmas.” Oh! that we had merry days all the year round, especially if we could make merry with such merriment as this. Do begin to be merry.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.